

Foundation Opens Village for Morakot Survivors

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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Thursday, February 11 is a landmark in the history of the Tzu Chi Foundation. It was the official opening of the Great Love Community in Shanlin, southern Taiwan, built for the survivors of Typhoon Morakot. The first 604 families moved into their new homes -- the start of their new life.

On Monday, which marked exactly six months since the typhoon devastated southern Taiwan, the foundation, the Kaohsiung county government and representatives from the affected villages signed an agreement to hand over the homes to the new residents. "I am very happy and overjoyed," said Liu Jinhe, who formerly lived in Namaxia village: "thank you, Tzu Chi." Zhang Yizhi, also from Namaxia village, said that they were very satisfied. "In the future, you can say that we will have a very happy home." The two were speaking for all the families; joy and gratitude were written on their faces.

Under the agreement, the new owners received the homes for nothing; they can pass them on but not sell or rent them.

"From now on, they have permanent and secure homes," said Lin Piyu, vice president of the foundation. "They can face the future for generations to come." The hope of Tzu Chi and the government is that the new village in Shanlin will become an international model for the rebuilding of a community after a disaster.



To welcome the residents into their new homes and make them feel comfortable, the volunteers prepared gifts, so that they will be able to lead a normal life from the first day. There were 65 items, for the kitchen, bathroom, bedroom and living room. Food items included rice, soy sauce and vinegar; there were also washbasins, towels, quilts, pillow cases and medical kits. Of the items, 27 were donated by stores and individuals, a moving gesture. "It was very moving to see the Great Love homes being finished day by day and so many gifts prepared for the residents," said volunteer Chen Youqing. "They will have rice, oil, soy sauce and vinegar. As soon as they move in, they can start cooking and eating." The items have been carefully prepared by the volunteers, to enable the typhoon survivors to start their new lives in the best way.

Among them is Ran Cuiying, a native of China who moved here after marrying a Taiwanese man; they lost their home, in Liugui township, to the typhoon. "I was devastated by the loss," she said. "The rain was very heavy; a mudslide came down from behind and burst through the wall." After the foundation selected her to be among those moving into the new village, it invited her to join its 'work relief program', which paid people to build their new homes. "When Tzu Chi called me about the program, I was very happy and could not sleep all night. I want to join Tzu Chi as soon as I move here. Since I joined the program, I felt safe and secure about the future.

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While I was working on the home, I thought about the interior decoration and where I would put the fridge.” She and her family used to fear typhoons every year. In their new home in Shanlin, they will no longer have to worry.

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